

News Release

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Assembly budget has potential to expand vouchers statewide

MADISON — In a statement issued today, State Superintendent Tony Evers criticized the Wisconsin State Assembly's late-night amendment on private school vouchers, which sets the stage for expansion of vouchers statewide without public debate or input.

"Once again in the middle of the night, the majority party in the Assembly voted to expand taxpayer-funded vouchers for religious and private schools. This time the result is a hidden expansion of vouchers statewide.

"Wisconsin is now set to expand vouchers for private and religious schools, while making a catastrophic \$1.6 billion cut in funding for public schools.

"With no public debate or local input, the Assembly passed and sent to the Senate a budget that makes school districts across Wisconsin potentially eligible for voucher expansion. At this point, one school district meets all four financial and size criteria – Racine. And one city, Green Bay, meets three of the four criteria. Using the voucher expansion criteria, it is possible that school districts serving the cities of Appleton, Eau Claire, La Crosse, Madison, Oshkosh, Sheboygan, Superior, West Allis, and others would have vouchers in the near future. There have been no public hearings, nor disclosure of these plans. Additionally, the governor has the most powerful veto pen in the nation and could bring vouchers to every district in the state. The local taxpayers of these districts, and potentially all school districts, could end up with vouchers without any voice or vote in the process.

"It is also important to note that this budget makes other changes, including increasing the income eligibility for vouchers by almost 100 percent. Furthermore, any religious or private school in the state, not just in Milwaukee County, is now allowed to participate in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program.

"The long-term implications of expanding vouchers for religious and private schools outside Milwaukee and to families with greater income are profound for our 872,000 public school students, their parents, and taxpayers. This budget defunds public education, while setting the table for taxpayers to pay over a billion dollars a year for a statewide voucher system that supports private and religious schools. This is just wrong. This is no way to

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set educational policy or improve our public schools. A state public school system that, I remind you, leads the nation in high school graduation.”

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NOTES: A chart analyzing choice eligibility for private and religious school vouchers for the state’s school districts is available on the Department of Public Instruction newsroom website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/newsroom.html>. This news release is available electronically at http://dpi.wi.gov/eis/pdf/dpinr2011_73.pdf.